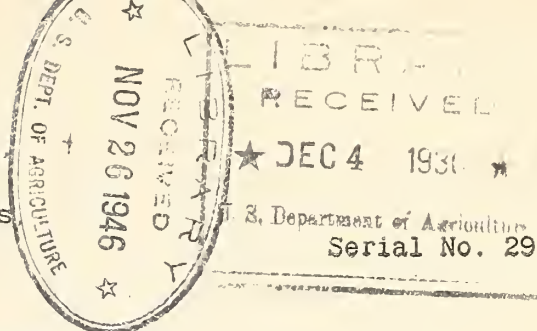


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Excerpt from a radio talk by
W. R. M. Wharton, chief, eastern
district, Food and Drug Administration,
U. S. Department of Agriculture,
through WJZ and associated NBC stations
Monday, November 24, 1930.



HOW TO READ THE LABEL

Potatoes

Have you been in the habit of asking your grocer for a peck of potatoes and accepting any kind he happened to give you, or have you been insisting upon buying by grade? Besides the Federal Grades, which have been established by the United States Department of Agriculture, many of the States have established grades for potatoes and now in the wholesale trade, at least, nearly all potatoes are sold by grades. A large percentage of the containers, barrels and bags, are marked with grade designations, either State or Federal or both, and by the way, the majority of the States have adopted the U. S. Grades. Only a few of the States have grades of their own which differ from the Federal Grades and these do not differ in any material degree.

Now I may as well say at the outset that these grade designations ordinarily are applied to the wholesale container, the sack or barrel, and I realize, too, that few housewives buy potatoes in these original shipping containers. Occasionally, however, you housewives do buy by the sack, and not infrequently your grocer serves you out of the sack or barrel in which he has received the potatoes. For that reason, I don't think it amiss for you to have accurate information about what these Federal Grade designations stand for.

There are three Federal Grades for potatoes. These are (1) U. S. Fancy Potatoes, (2) U. S. Grade No. 1 Potatoes, and (3) U. S. Grade No. 2 Potatoes.

U. S. Fancy Potatoes must be of one variety and must be mature, bright, well shaped, free from freezing injury, soft rot, dirt or other foreign matter; free from sunburn, growth cracks, hollow heart, cut, scab, blight, dry rot, or any insect or mechanical injury or disease, and free from second growths and all other defects. In no case shall the diameter be less than 2 inches, but the minimum diameter or minimum weight or range in diameter or weight may be stated on the label following the grade name. Certain tolerances below these qualifications are allowed, as follows, no more than 5% by weight of any lot may vary from the size stated and in addition not more than 6% by weight of any lot may be below the remaining requirements of the grade but not to exceed 1% shall be allowed to be affected by soft rot. You will note that the requirements for this grade are very exacting indeed. The fact is that only a very, very limited quantity of U. S. Fancy Potatoes appear on the market.

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The next U. S. Grade for potatoes is "U. S. Grade No. 1 Potatoes" and the vast proportion of potatoes sold are under this grade designation. The requirements for U. S. Grade No. 1 Potatoes are that the potatoes shall be of similar varietal characteristics and not badly misshapen; free from freezing and soft rot and from damage caused by dirt and other foreign matter, sunburn, second growth, growth cracks, hollow heart, cuts, scab, blight, dry rot, disease, insects or mechanical or other means. The diameters of potatoes of this grade in round varieties are not allowed to be less than 1-7/8 inches and of potatoes of long varieties not less than 1-3/4 inches, but lots of potatoes which are not less than 1 1/2 inches in diameter which meet the remaining requirements of this grade may be designated "U. S. Grade No. 1, 1 1/2 inches minimum." In order to allow for variations incident to proper grading and handling, not more than 5% by weight of any lot may be below the prescribed size. In addition, not more than 5% by weight may be damaged by hollow heart and not more than 6% may be below the remaining requirements of this grade, but not more than 1% of this amount shall be allowed for potatoes affected with soft rot.

Soft rot or other deterioration developing in transit on potatoes otherwise up to grade shall be considered as affecting the condition and not the grade.

The third and last U. S. Grade is U. S. Grade No. 2 Potatoes. The requirements for this grade are that the potatoes shall be of similar varietal characteristics, and free from freezing injury and soft rot, and from serious damage caused by sunburn, second growth, growth cracks, hollow heart, cuts, scab, blight, dry rot, disease, insects, or mechanical, or other means. The diameter of potatoes of this grade shall not be less than 1 1/2 inches. The tolerance allowance from these specifications is that not more than 5% by weight of any lot may be below the prescribed size and, in addition, not more than 6% by weight may be below the remaining requirements of the grade. Not more than 1% is allowed to be affected by soft rot.

Now let us see what the differences are between Grade No. 1 and No. 2. U. S. Grade No. 1 Potatoes may not be badly misshapen; U. S. Grade No. 2 may be badly misshapen. U. S. No. 1 Potatoes are required to be free from damage caused by the various conditions named, whereas U. S. Grade No. 2 are only required to be free from serious damage. U. S. Grade No. 1 Potatoes are required to have an average diameter of 1-7/8 inches for round varieties and 1-3/4 inches for long varieties, while Grade No. 2 are not required to be larger than 1 1/2 inches in diameter. However, remember that U. S. Grade No. 1 may have an average diameter of 1 1/2 inches as a minimum if the lot meets all the other requirements of Grade No. 1 and the label states "U. S. Grade No. 1, 1 1/2 inches minimum." In the case of U. S. Grade No. 1 Potatoes, 6% may be below the requirements of the grade other than size and, in addition, 5% may be damaged by hollow heart; but in the case of U. S. No. 2 Grade, 6% defective stock is allowed to be seriously damaged, all of which may be hollow

heart. These differences, my friends, are material. So material that they result in quite a considerable difference in price. In general, No. 2 Potatoes sell for one-half the price asked for No. 1 Potatoes. Therefore, do you not see why it is necessary for you to know the grade of the potatoes you are buying in order that you may pay the price for the grade that you get?

Potatoes are often sold by name of location or state of production and these designations have a value to the label reader as indicating quality. For example, in the greater New York Metropolitan area, Long Island potatoes are preferred by most housewives and there is a reason, because in general, Long Island potatoes are of superior quality. In New England, Maine potatoes are shown the preference, and there is a reason, for Maine potatoes are of superior quality. In a large portion of the United States, Idaho potatoes are preferred---especially for baking purposes---and there is a reason, because Idaho potatoes are of superior quality for baking purposes. In certain sections of the Northwest, Michigan potatoes are considered superior. This does not mean that other States do not produce superior potatoes also. All States produce good potatoes, and when these are purchased according to government grades, it is desirable that they be found to be of the quality indicated by the grade designation.

I want to add this final word of caution to my discussion of the meaning of the U. S. Grade designations for potatoes. As a rule, potatoes are graded and labeled at the point of shipment. And usually they may be expected to conform reasonably well with grade designations when they reach their destinations. But occasionally unavoidable delays---resulting in some deterioration---may affect somewhat the condition of potatoes by the time they reach the retail distributor. I mention this merely because it is always wise for the housekeeper to combine intelligent label reading with good judgment when she purchases a commodity of a perishable kind.

My friends, do you know that 60 pounds of potatoes make one bushel. If you buy a peck of potatoes, you should get 15 pounds. It is important to check your weights on all food products purchased. You should know that potatoes are packed often in 100-pound bags, sometimes in 120-pound bags, and frequently in 150-pound bags. When you buy a bag of potatoes, read the label to see what weight you get. Potatoes are also packed in U. S. Standard Barrels. These hold 165 pounds or 2-3/4 bushels. They are labeled generally "One U. S. Standard Barrel."

